



John Gilpin

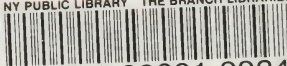
821 Cowper  
The diverting history of John Gilpin

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THE DIVERTING HISTORY  
OF JOHN GILPIN

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Cowper William

THE  
**Diberting History**  
OF  
**John Gilpin**

SHEWING how he went further  
than he intended, and came  
safe home again

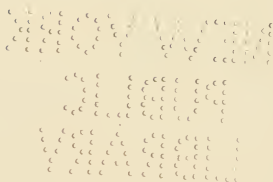
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London  
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TO  
**Harriet Walton Seaver**  
FOR WHOSE AMUSEMENT THE WORK  
WAS BEGUN AND WHOSE  
ENTHUSIASM INSPIRED  
ITS COMPLETION



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THE DIVERTING HISTORY  
OF JOHN GILPIN



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THE  
**Diverting History**  
OF  
**John Gilpin**

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John Gilpin was a citizen  
Of credit and renown,  
A trainband captain eke was  
he  
Of famous London town.

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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John Gilpin's spouse said to her  
dear,  
"Though wedded we have been  
These twice ten tedious years,  
yet we  
No holiday have seen.

Tomorrow is our wedding day,  
And we will then repair  
Unto the Bell at Edmonton,  
All in a chaise and pair.

## OF JOHN GILPIN

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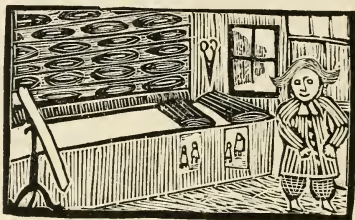


My sister, and my sister's child,  
Myself, and children three,  
Will fill the chaise, so you must  
ride  
On horseback after we."

He soon replied, "I do admire  
Of womankind but one,  
And you are she, my dearest  
dear,  
Therefore it shall be done.

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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I am a linendraper bold,  
As all the world doth know,  
And my good friend the calender  
Will lend his horse to go."

Quoth Mrs. Gilpin, "That's well  
said;  
And for that wine is dear,  
We will be furnished with our  
own,  
Which is both bright and clear."

## OF JOHN GILPIN

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John Gilpin kissed his loving wife,  
O'erjoyed was he to find,  
That though on pleasure she was  
bent,  
She had a frugal mind.

The morning came, the chaise  
was brought,  
But yet was not allowed  
To drive up to the door, lest all  
Should say that she was proud.

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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So three doors off the chaise was  
stayed,

Where they did all get in ;  
Six precious souls, and all agog  
To dash through thick and thin.

Smack went the whip, round  
went the wheels,

Were never folk so glad ;  
The stones did rattle underneath  
As if Cheapside were mad.



## OF JOHN GILPIN

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John Gilpin at his horse's side  
Seized fast the flowing mane,  
And up he got, in haste to ride,  
But soon came down again;

For saddle-tree scarce reached  
    had he,  
His journey to begin,  
When, turning round his head,  
    he saw  
Three customers come in.

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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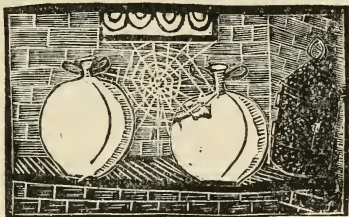


Sodownhe came ; for loss of time,  
Although it grieved him sore,  
Yet loss of pence, full well he  
knew,  
Would trouble him much more.

'Twas long before the customers  
Were suited to their mind,  
When Betty screaming came  
down stairs,—  
“The wine is left behind!”

## OF JOHN GILPIN

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“Good lack!” quoth he, “yet  
bring it me,  
My leathern belt likewise,  
In which I bear my trusty sword  
When I do exercise.”

Now Mrs. Gilpin, careful soul,  
Had two stone bottles found,  
To hold the liquor that she  
loved,  
And keep it safe and sound.

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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Each bottle had a curling ear,  
Through which the belt he  
drew,  
And hung a bottle on each side,  
To make his balance true.

Then over all, that he might be  
Equipped from top to toe,  
His long red cloak, well brushed  
and neat,  
He manfully did throw.

## OF JOHN GILPIN

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Now see him mounted once  
again,  
Upon his nimble steed,  
Full slowly pacing o'er the stones  
With caution and good heed.

But finding soon a smoother  
road  
Beneath his well-shod feet,  
The snorting beast began to trot,  
Which galled him in his seat.

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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So “Fair and softly” John he  
cried,  
But John he cried in vain;  
That trot became a gallop soon,  
In spite of curb and rein.

So stooping down, as needs he must  
Who cannot sit upright,  
He grasped the mane with both  
his hands,  
And eke with all his might.

## OF JOHN GILPIN

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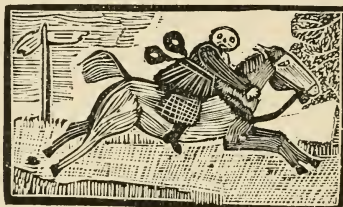


His horse, who never in that sort  
Had handled been before,  
What thing upon his back had  
got  
Did wonder more and more.

Away went Gilpin, neck or  
nought;  
Away went hat and wig;  
He little dreamed when he set out  
Of running such a rig.

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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The wind did blow, the cloak did  
fly,  
Like streamer long and gay,  
Till, loop and button failing both,  
At last it flew away.

Then might all people well dis-  
cern,  
The bottles he had slung;  
A bottle swinging at each side,  
As hath been said or sung.



## OF JOHN GILPIN

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The dogs did bark, the children  
screamed,

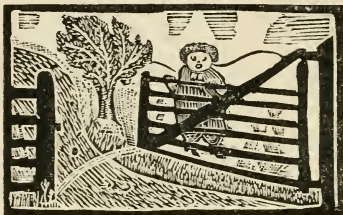
Up flew the windows all,  
And every soul cried out "Well  
done!"

As loud as he could bawl.

Away went Gilpin—who but he?  
His fame soon spread around;  
"He carries weight, he rides a race!  
'Tis for a thousand pound!"

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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And still, as fast as he drew  
near,

'Twas wonderful to view,  
How in a trice the turnpike men  
Their gates wide open threw.

And now, as he went bowing  
down

His reeking head full low,  
The bottles twain behind his back  
Were shattered at a blow.

## OF JOHN GILPIN

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Down ran the wine into the road,  
Most piteous to be seen,  
Which made his horse's flanks  
to smoke,  
As they had basted been.

But still he seemed to carry  
weight,  
With leathern girdle braced;  
For all might see the bottle necks  
Still dangling at his waist.

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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Thus all through merry Isling-  
ton

These gambols he did play,  
Until he came unto the Wash  
Of Edmonton so gay ;

And there he threw the Wash  
about,  
On both sides of the way,  
Just like unto a trundling mop,  
Or a wild goose at play.

## OF JOHN GILPIN

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At Edmonton his loving wife  
From the balcony spied  
Her tender husband, wondering  
much  
To see how he did ride.

“Stop, stop, John Gilpin! Here’s  
the house!”  
They all at once did cry;  
“The dinner waits and we are tired.”  
Said Gilpin, “So am I!”

# THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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But yet his horse was not a whit  
Inclined to tarry there ;  
For why? his owner had a  
house  
Full ten miles off, at Ware.

So like an arrow swift he flew,  
Shot by an archer strong ;  
So did he fly—which brings me  
to  
The middle of my song.

## OF JOHN GILPIN

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Away went Gilpin, out of  
breath,  
And sore against his will,  
Till, at his friend the calender's,  
His horse at last stood still.

The calender, amazed to see  
His neighbour in such trim,  
Laid down his pipe, flew to the  
gate,  
And thus accosted him:

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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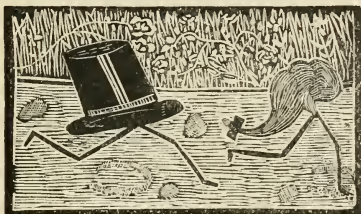
“What news? what news? your  
tidings tell;  
Tell me you must and shall;  
Say why bareheaded you are  
come,  
Or why you come at all?”

Now Gilpin had a pleasant wit,  
And loved a timely joke;  
And thus unto the calender,  
In merry guise, he spoke:



## OF JOHN GILPIN

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“I came because your horse  
would come;  
And, if I well forebode,  
My hat and wig will soon be  
here:—  
They are upon the road.”

The calender, right glad to find  
His friend in merry pin,  
Returned him not a single word,  
But to the house went in;

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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Whence straight he came with  
hat and wig;  
A wig that flowed behind,  
A hat not much the worse for  
wear,  
Each comely in its kind.

He held them up and in his turn  
Thus showed his ready wit:  
“My head is twice as big as yours,  
They therefore needs must fit.

## OF JOHN GILPIN

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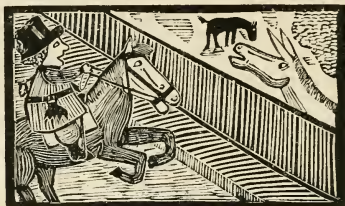


But let me scrape the dirt away  
That hangs upon your face;  
And stop and eat, for well you  
may  
Be in a hungry case."

Said John, "It is my wedding  
day,  
And all the world would stare,  
If wife should dine at Edmonton  
And I should dine at Ware."

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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So turning to his horse he said,  
“I am in haste to dine;  
'Twas for your pleasure you  
came here,  
You shall go back for mine.”

Ah! luckless speech and bootless  
boast,  
For which he paid full dear;  
For while he spake, a braying ass  
Did sing most loud and clear;

## OF JOHN GILPIN

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Whereat his horse did snort,  
as he  
Had heard a lion roar,  
And galloped off with all his  
might,  
As he had done before.

Away went Gilpin, and away  
Went Gilpin's hat and wig:  
He lost them sooner than at first;  
For why? — they were too big.

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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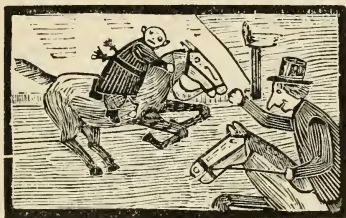
Now mistress Gilpin, when she  
saw

Her husband posting down  
Into the country far away,  
She pulled out half-a-crown;

And thus unto the youth she said,  
That drove them to the Bell,  
“This shall be yours when you  
bring back  
My husband safe and well.”

## OF JOHN GILPIN

---



The youth did ride, and soon did  
meet

John coming back amain ;  
Whom in a trice he tried to stop  
By catching at his rein ;

But not performing what he meant  
And gladly would have done,  
The frightened steed he frightened  
more,  
And made him faster run.

## THE DIVERTING HISTORY

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Away went Gilpin, and away  
Went postboy at his heels,  
The postboy's horse right glad  
to miss  
The lumbering of the wheels.

Six gentlemen upon the road,  
Thus seeing Gilpin fly,  
With postboy scampering in the  
rear,  
They raised the hue and cry; —  
40



## OF JOHN GILPIN

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“Stop thief! stop thief! a high-  
wayman!”

Not one of them was mute;  
And all and each that passed that  
way  
Did join in the pursuit.

And now the turnpike gates again  
Flew open in short space;  
The toll-men thinking as before,  
That Gilpin rode a race.

## JOHN GILPIN

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And so he did, and won it too,  
For he got first to town;  
Nor stopped till where he had  
got up  
He did again get down.

Now let us sing long live the  
King,  
And Gilpin, long live he;  
And when he next doth ride abroad  
May I be there to see!

ADDITIONAL VERSES  
AND NOTES



## ADDITIONAL VERSES AND NOTES

The story of John Gilpin's ride was related to Cowper by his friend, Lady Austen, who had heard it as a child. It caused the poet a sleepless night, as he was kept awake by laughter at it. During these restless hours he turned it into the famous ballad. It appeared in the "Public Advertiser," November 14, 1782, anonymously.

A celebrated actor named Henderson took it for one of his

## ADDITIONAL VERSES

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public recitations at Freemasons' Hall. It became immediately so popular that it was printed everywhere, — in newspapers, magazines, and separately. It was even sung as a common ballad in the streets. It has preserved its popularity to the present day.

The original John Gilpin was, it is said, a Mr. Beyer, a linen-draper, who lived at the Cheap-side corner of Paternoster Row. He died in 1791, at the age of nearly a hundred years.

The following matter appears in Moore's Book of Ballads, pub-

## AND NOTES

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lished by Bell and Daldy, 186, Fleet Street, and 6, York Street, Covent Garden, London.

[“ In Hone’s ‘ Table Book,’ ii, 79, the following stanzas are stated to have been found, in the handwriting of Cowper, among the papers of Mrs. Unwin. In the opinion of Mr. Hone’s correspondent, they evidently formed part of an intended episode to the *Diverting History of John Gilpin*. They are not given in any edition of the poet’s works.”]

Then Mrs. Gilpin sweetly said  
Unto her children three  
“ I’ll clamber o’er this style so high  
And you climb after me,”

But having climbed unto the top  
She could no further go,  
But sate, to every passer by  
A spectacle and show :

## ADDITIONAL VERSES

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Who said, Your spouse and you this  
day

Both show your horsemanship ;  
And if you stay till he comes back  
Your horse will need no whip.













